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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of Melvil Dewey's work in the American public library, both in Dewey's day and today. Using the writings of Melvil Dewey, as well as writings about him, this study examined what changes Dewey made and influenced as they specifically related to services provided to library users. This included studying Dewey's role in the organization of the library materials using the Dewey Decimal Classification System, the development of cooperative cataloging, and the creation and implementation of services to library users. The study focused on the impact of several theories that were the driving force behind Dewey's work in the library field. These theories contained several components, including the need for an organized library and the role of the library as a companion to public schools in the education of the common man. Dewey's work also focused on the need for the library to provide information to the user efficiently and with careful expenditure of the library's resources, both human and financial. (Contains 30 references.) (AEF)

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# THE MODERN PUBLIC LIBRARY AND MELVIL DEWEY: WHAT HE CHANGED, WHAT WE'VE CHANGED, AND WHAT HASN'T CHANGED.

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library
and Information Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Laura E. Salmon

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# CHAPTER I.

## INTRODUCTION

Libraries have played an important role in countries, cities, and towns all over the world. From early times and all the way into the early 1800s, these libraries had become the place for the great scholars and the educated men to go to share their knowledge and to read. The ordinary person was either not permitted to or actually unable (because of illiteracy) to use a library. As time went on, libraries began to serve the general masses of people as the level of education and the American economy grew, thus allowing men like Andrew Carnegie to invest in the public library. Even then, libraries were not utilized to the same degree as they are today.

The public library as we know it today has not always existed. Before 1876, libraries were primarily used for collection and preservation of books. Public access was a highly controversial issue, as librarians harbored some irrational fears (but somewhat understandable, considering the state of the library at the time.) Many librarians considered ideas like misplaced books and the amount of wear and tear on the books housed in open stacks fairly significant issues that would require constant supervision of the patrons as they looked at and used the books. All of these concepts were new to the public library, where for years a library user had to tell the librarian what book was desired and the librarian had to locate and provide it. The concept of open shelves, public access, and borrowing privileges did not exist before 1876.

By the late 1800s, public libraries had begun going through some pretty significant growing pains. Reference services, branch libraries, and the use of a library as a social center were fairly radical ideas in their time, despite being commonplace today.



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These changes began to spread around 1876, when the world of the public library was impacted by the work of one man. Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey, known by his preferred (and shortened) name of Melvil Dewey, had carved a career out of indulging his obsession of turning libraries into organized, efficient, and uniform entities.

Dewey was a lover of books from the time he learned to read. He was a man of obsessions, including education of the masses, the world of library work in general, the efficient use of time, and the wise (and efficient) use of money. These obsessions were so ingrained into his character that he became compulsive and single-minded in each task that he deemed important enough to devote his complete attention to. He became fixated on the idea of making the library more accessible to the user, or in more up to date terminology, to make the library more "user friendly." His idea was to change the library from the inside out, and that included making changes from how the library was set up to the physical set up of the library, as well as "mundane" things like the hours of operation. As his changes in the public library began to spread, Dewey gained a reputation for being "a man of both ideas and indefatigable industry" (Rider 1944, 13).

Dewey began his library career as a student assistant while attending Amherst College in New York. After graduation, he became an assistant librarian at Amherst. His library experience as a student included shelving books, which had an order to them although the location of the books often was difficult to use and to comprehend. This caused Dewey to begin pondering approaches to best organize the books, thus allowing easier location and shelving. True to form, this dilemma became an obsession. The results of this obsession resulted in the first of many changes that led to the development of the modern public library, as we know it today.

After organizing the library, Dewey began to focus on improving library procedures, supplies, and devices. All of these changes were designed to do one thing: create public libraries that were uniform, regardless of the size or location. Dewey envisioned all of these changes to have several outcomes, including freeing the librarian to spend time focusing on what Dewey felt were the most important purposes that a public library had: providing reading matter to be distributed to the masses and being companions to the public schools in what he called "the general popularization of knowledge" (Hessel 1955, 99).

## Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose in doing this study was to determine not only what changes Melvil Dewey was responsible for, but also the extent to which these changes have been maintained, adjusted, or completely removed from the modern public library. While there has been much written on the impact that Melvil Dewey had on the world of librarianship, it was difficult to find a single source that compared Dewey's original visions of the library, including organization and service with the current state of librarianship.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this paper, the following terms were defined as given.

A public library is one that is supported by public money, usually in the form of tax dollars, as well as private donations. The goal of this type of library is to consume, preserve, transmit, and provide access to information, regardless of who the user is.

A user is anyone who chooses to seek information in any public library, regardless of residency in the library's service area.

User services are defined as any service provided by a public library, whether reference, circulation, or other offered service. The purpose of offering service to users is to allow anyone who desires it to have access to whatever information will fulfill the need of the user.

User access is defined as the availability and accessibility of material, in any format, to fulfill an information need of a library user, whether that user has assistance from a library staff member or does so individually.

A primary source is a term that refers to the type of material being consulted in a historical framework. Primary automatically refers to any document authored by Melvil Dewey, whether published or unpublished.

A secondary source is another term that refers to the type of material being consulted in a historical framework. Secondary automatically refers to any document written about Melvil Dewey, as well as to documents that include (but are not limited to) critiques, reviews, or analyses of Dewey's life and work.

## Limitations of the Study

This paper was very limited in terms of the amount of material consulted. While there are significant amounts of Dewey's writings available in the archives of Columbia University, the majority of citations credited to Melvil Dewey himself came from early issues of Library Journal (LJ), which was originally referred to as American Library Journal during the majority of Dewey's career in librarianship. Even these sources were limited to the holdings of the Kent State University and the Akron Summit County Public Library. Some information came from other sources, like government reports and materials published about Melvil Dewey, as well as a few biographical sources that were primarily consulted for their interpretive and analytical evaluations of Dewey's career and character.

Of the sources consulted, some sources were available through Kent State University itself. Other materials that were unavailable at Kent State University were obtained through interlibrary loan or other means. This study only includes materials that were available through these methods. This also limited the amount of material consulted.

## CHAPTER II.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To be able to determine the scope of Dewey's work, it was necessary to search the existing literature. This was accomplished by first studying Dewey himself first, then searching through available materials that he himself had done. After gathering that information, it was necessary to find material that actually evaluated, critiqued, and analyzed Dewey's library career.

There are few biographies available about Melvil Dewey in existence. Dawe's 1932 biography, Melvil Dewey: Seer-Inspirer-Doer carried quite a glowing tribute to Dewey, with very little objective analysis of his career. This is because this was the only sanctioned biography of Melvil Dewey by his survivors, who were as passionate about is life's work as Dewey himself was. The 1944 biography, Melvil Dewey was done by Fremont Rider, who was more critical of Dewey and his work. Instead of a glowing tribute, he looked objectively at Dewey's character and his life's work. Rider presented Dewey in a more realistic light, showing not only Dewey's amazing skills but also his faults. Rider was an outsider who worked with Dewey as his assistant at Amherst College, and later married Dewey's niece.

Weigand's biography, Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey, started as a dissertation and grew into a book published in 1996 by the American Library Association. This biography is a rather unbiased look at Melvil Dewey's life and work, and really seemed to get to the heart of Dewey's character and work. The book also

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provided an almost equal division between Dewey's life in the library field and his life after he finally felt he was unable to continue to influence the library profession.

In 1978, Vann collected and edited reprinted some of Dewey's own writings and combined them with analyses and commentaries of what those works said and meant. This collection was entitled Melvil Dewey: His Enduring Presence in Librarianship and is very limited in the amount of material covered. There are articles from Library Journal and some of the archived writings that Dewey did. But each article covers an individual topic, such as the actual set up of shelves and the temperature of the library for the benefit of the books, the reasons behind the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, and why the American Library Association (ALA) is so important to librarianship. Very little of what was written actually covered the effect of these changes, needs, etc. on the user.

A book was put together following the New York State Library's seminar in 1983 commemorating the birth and death of Melvil Dewey. This collection, called Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification looked at the influence that Dewey had on librarianship and how the DDC has evolved through the years. There is significant criticism and evaluation of Dewey's work, however again, little is said about the services offered to users and how the public library has changed.

In addition to these items, it seemed worthwhile to consult some books on library history. After all, Dewey certainly had an impact on the history of the modern day library. Since this paper is written in the historical perspective, it also seemed wise to see what previous library history books said about Dewey. Hessel's A History of Libraries was put out in two editions, 1950 and 1955. Hessel spent little time discussing Dewey and his changes in the library, so these books were used for background information of

the public library before Melvil Dewey really became influential in the library world. Harris' 1995 book, History of Libraries in the Western World was used for the same purpose as Hessel's work.

In order to show how Dewey's changes relate to the modern public library, it was necessary to examine the state of the public library before Dewey began influencing significant changes. There have been many books published about the public library in general, but few were actually appropriate for the goals of this paper. Oehlert's book, Books and Blueprints: Building America's Public Libraries, which was written in 1991, was actually written to evaluate the evolution of architecture and physical layout of the public library in a chronological fashion from before Dewey's time to the late 1980s. Fortunately, as the physical layout of the library changed, so did the types of services offered, which was why this book fit so well into the study of this paper.

It was also necessary to search for materials that discussed the evolution and changes in library service since that is the purpose of this paper. Williamson, who worked for the Carnegie Foundation, wrote Training for Library Service as a report to Andrew Carnegie in 1923 to show that the public library was worth the investment. His point was that the public library needed adequate funding to accomplish its goals and to adequately serve the people it served. This report discussed some of the types of services offered in the public library following 1876 when Dewey had begun to really push for significant change.

Finally, in studying the impact of Melvil Dewey's career in librarianship, it was necessary to find material relating to user services that Dewey himself wrote. He wrote many articles in Library Journal (LJ) during his career, and it was imperative to this paper

to locate those articles containing Dewey's own theories pertaining to users and user services in the public library. These articles ranged from the reasons behind the creation of the Dewey Decimal Classification, to the need for standardized (and cooperative) cataloging in each public library, and other issues.

In 1920, Dewey wrote an article explaining why and how he had come up with the Dewey Decimal Classification in "Decimal Classification Beginnings." He explained the reasoning behind the Arabic numbers, the particular way the disciplines were organized and why, and the benefits of why this classification scheme really worked when compared to the previous method of shelving books.

"Cooperative Cataloging" was written in 1876, explaining why it was so important for the public libraries to not only catalog books but to share the information once the books were cataloged. This was one of the most dominant theories Dewey had to create a standard and more uniform public library. He also spent quite a bit of time discussing the process of how to go about sharing the information once a book was correctly cataloged.

Dewey contributed to several government reports on library catalogs and cataloging during his library career. Most of these reports discussed the role of the modern public library in assisting the public schools to educate the masses. This was part of the role that Dewey felt the public library filled, along with the need to educate the common man. For instance, Dewey's submission of articles to the Report on Public Libraries in the United States of America, 1876 and the Report to the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1887-1888 explained Dewey's thoughts on that very idea of educating the common man and to assist the public schools.

## CHAPTER III.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to do this paper, it was necessary to select an appropriate guide to writing in the historical perspective. The primary guide used in this paper was Sanderlin's Writing the History Paper: How to Select, Collect, Interpret, Organize, and Write Your Term Paper. This book detailed and explained the process of researching and creating an original historical research paper. The direction of this paper was to discover themes nad concepts developed and initiated by Melvil Dewey that related to user services, as well as to see if these initiatives were still being observed according to more recent literature. Some commentary and evaluation of Dewey found in secondary sources was used to challenge or support the suggestion that Dewey continues to influence the profession, many decades after his death.

Since this paper revolves around the work of Melvil Dewey, and considering it is a historical study, it was necessary to include information written by Dewey himself. Most of the information gleaned from Dewey came from articles he contributed to Library Journal throughout his career in librarianship. Most of the information obtained from these articles included small pieces of an otherwise large article on an individual topic, such as the Dewey Decimal Classification system.

A comparison was then done as to the state of the public library that Dewey worked in and the modern public library of today. Some of the writings of Melvil Dewey were utilized, as there were sufficient examples of his work. These primary sources were then combined with other sources that could also be considered primary, like the occasional letter and reports that were made to various government agencies.

Biographies and other secondary sources were then consulted to supplement and analyze the information that was included in the primary sources.

User service philosophy and practice today needed to be studied and compared to Dewey's approaches instituted over a century ago. In order to study these questions, Dewey's own work was examined, along with other materials. Some of these materials were available at Kent State University. Others needed to be located by other means, such as other library catalogs, indexes, bibliographies, and references. For example, several biographies written about Dewey included references to other works and provided topics that were appropriate to this study.

Similar sources (indexes and references) in recent and current literature of librarianship and information science were searched to discover what was being said about the changes that Dewey instituted (and still exist) in the library profession today. Some of the current evidence consisted of indexed references to library services, education, and professional activities that paralleled Dewey's own proposals and practices. These secondary sources complemented the primary data and enabled the evaluation of the ongoing impact of Dewey's work.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

Melvil Dewey had some very significant ideas of what a public library should be. He believed that the public library should not only preserve and acquire the best materials, but that it should intervene on behalf of the society in recommending and buying the best books for its users. The collection should be effectively used and of high quality. Dewey even believed that the library should be the initiator in promoting good reading (Wiegand, 1996). These beliefs led to many of the changes that Dewey instituted in the public library, and all ended up affecting the quality of services to the users in the libraries.

As mentioned earlier, Dewey had pondered the best solution to improving shelf organization for many years before creating the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. The DDC was published in its first edition in 1876. Dewey felt that using Arabic numbers would allow library catalogers to have an unlimited range within which to organize materials (Stevenson and Kramer-Greene, 1983), as well as allowing users to locate all of the books on the same subject in one place. Dewey also recognized that DDC would not solve every problem with classifying an item, which was not a problem during Dewey's career, but is now with the rapid technological development.

The Dewey Decimal Classification was originally devised for cataloging, but once it was put into actual use, it was found to be very valuable for shelf arrangement and numbering as well (Dewey, 1876). Before the DDC was devised, librarians were continually recataloging and reclassifying the materials owned by the library, which

Dewey felt was not only an inefficient use of staff time but a waste of library money as well. Dewey used Arabic numbers because he felt that a numerical arrangement was much easier to use. This method of book classification made it easier for librarians and library users to locate desired materials efficiently, since all of the materials were organized into permanent classes, divisions, and sections on the shelf. Eventually, the Dewey Decimal Classification became even more minutely detailed as people began to see the benefit of its use (Dewey, 1920).

The card catalog and subject index guides seekers to a book's exact location on the shelf quickly and efficiently, because "every book has its place" and "it's easy to determine where that place is" (Dewey 1876, 635). The alphabetical subject guide is designed to give numbers for and aid in finding books and all books on any given subject are found together. This is because Dewey intended that the content, rather than the form or other identifying characteristic, be the primary focus for determining the location of an item (Dewey, 1876). Subject names are brief and familiar to users instead of names that express fully the character of the books cataloged there. It is possible to locate books with apparently omitted subjects by looking them up in the subject indexes.

Flexibility is a result of the way Dewey set up his library classification. Dewey believed that he created a system that was flexible enough to accommodate any adjustments that must be made when dealing with the rapidly changing world. He wanted library users to locate the materials that were needed with a minimum amount of difficulty. In the end, Dewey's primary goal was to organize libraries into a standard, uniform method of organization without local alterations interfering with the classification of the materials in the library (Stevenson and Kramer-Greene, 1983).

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Shelf arrangement was very important to Dewey, allowing library users to locate an item. Dewey insisted that the author's names were to be in alphabetical order because "it is without a doubt the only system of finding any given book without catalog or index and with only the information generally possessed by readers" (Dewey 1879, 192). Dewey also was specific about the way the shelf arrangement was to be done, which is how the disciplines used to organize items in the Dewey Decimal Classification were originally selected. Books were selected based on similar characteristics and content. They were then given a location together based on these similarities, and shelved in alphabetical order. Each new book for the location was given an individual, unique number before being added to the section (Dawe, 1932).

Cataloging materials was a primary concern to Melvil Dewey. He was adamant that clear, organized, user-friendly cataloging was necessary for the facilitation of locating a book by a library user. Since cataloging was (and is) a time consuming, expensive, and difficult task, Dewey was determined to create one uniform way for it to be done. Dewey was responsible for several library inventions that revolutionized the way books were cataloged after determining how to classify them. Dewey created the library bibliographic card, sometimes referred to as a surrogate record today. The cards were to be written in a specific script, on a specific size card, and housed in a specific housing unit, which was referred to as a card catalog. These cards resided in drawers in the card catalog.

Dewey insisted that there were certain pieces of information that had to be made available on each card in the catalog, including the title, author, Dewey number, subject headings, physical descriptions, and other necessary notes. The cards were to be filed

according to the subject, title, and author (in alphabetical order) since the person who wanted the book may not have more than one piece of the afore mentioned information about the book. There were specific punctuation and form guidelines that were to be meticulously followed (Dewey, 1877). The basic function was to make it easy for the users and librarians to find whatever book was needed with ease and little time commitment.

Cooperative cataloging grew out of Dewey's belief that after an item was examined and cataloged by a library cataloger the information should be shared with other libraries. This would allow other libraries to use the time that would have been spent cataloging the same item to accomplish other, more important tasks (Dewey, 1876). This would also make the book's record more easily accessible, less expensive, and less difficult to add to multiple library catalogs. Every library's card catalog would then be uniform, allowing users to go from library to library and be able to locate the materials that they were searching for.

Looking at today's public library, the Dewey Decimal Classification system is still used to maintain Dewey's ideas of fixed location for materials, increasing access to the shelves for readers, and the subject matter being the primary way of cataloging a library item (Jackson, 1974). Public libraries also continue to catalog materials in the Dewey Decimal Classification system, although now the paper bibliographic card has gone the way of the dinosaur in most public libraries. The practice of cooperative cataloging has continued through the years, although now MARC records are the standard form and are for the most part downloaded from the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) or the Library of Congress (Schuchat, 1985). This fulfills Dewey's

desire of greater uniformity in the library catalogs that are available in public libraries today (Dewey, 1878).

Once the libraries had been organized (or at least the libraries had begun to organize), Dewey began to focus his attention on the user of the library and services that aided them in their search for materials and (as Dewey saw it) the fulfillment of the library's role in the education of the masses. Dewey was responsible for many changes in the public library during his tenure in the library field.

Some significant changes were introduced. The user finally had access to the shelves, which enabled them to go to the shelves themselves and pick what materials they wanted or needed. Open stacks were not standard in public libraries before Dewey began his career in the library field, as mentioned earlier in this study. Dewey also fostered an increase in the hours of operation of a library, which gave the common person more of a chance to go to the library when it was convenient. Dewey instituted changes in how materials were housed, including the physical shelving and the climate of the library environment to better care for the books themselves. Dewey recognized the clientele of the public library was not only men, but also women and children (Harris, 1995).

Dewey was aware of the people that he served in the library. His ideal library would contain the best books as well as materials that meet the needs of the users served by the library. Dewey's belief that the public library was responsible for sharing the education of the people with the public schools is still carried out today, as librarians pay careful attention to carrying the materials that are wanted by the users of the public library (Schuchat 1985), as well as offering services to aid students (young and old) in completing tasks during their schooling. Dewey also asserted that there was surely some

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place to be found in every general collection for fiction (Hessell, 1950) because even in the modern public library, "fiction should be retained for its relaxation and entertainment value" (Molz 1988, 13) as it had been during the Great Depression.

Dewey had a hand in establishing circulation policies in libraries, although the circulation policies were conceived during his tenure in academia and later adapted for public libraries. Loan periods were established (and later expanded) to two entire weeks. To make circulation policies even more "user friendly" (in modern terms) patrons were able to even renew materials one time. Overdue fines began to be charged during Dewey's career primarily to discourage theft, and were minimal, just as they are today. Users of the public library could have indefinite borrowing privileges, although once a user reached a certain amount of fines their borrowing privileges were suspended until the fines were paid (Jackson, 1974).

There were many other changes that Dewey helped foster in the public library, although many of these changes continued to evolve long after Dewey had left the library world behind to pursue other interests and goals. Libraries began to focus on children's materials and services. Libraries had to continue to grow and change as patrons began demanding more services, requiring changes in operations and materials provided. Storing materials became an issue, as well as providing reproduction of some materials for patrons, which led to microfilm and xerography. As libraries continued to grow, the need to expand both services and buildings also became an issue.

Dewey's career in the library field reached its pinnacle during the same period in library history as the library really began to evolve into what we know as the public library today. This period in library history was crucial to its survival into today's world

because it was developing into an institution that really meant something to the communities the public library served. Reference services were introduced, and libraries began organizing into departments rather than just putting all of the materials into one huge room. The library became a social center, and began to focus on the needs of adults, children, and immigrants in the community (Dumont, 1977).

To help the library users, Dewey felt is was necessary to ensure that there was a consistent level of knowledge among librarians in each library, regardless of location. He felt that the best way to accomplish this objective was to have skilled librarians in each library (Dewey, 1879). Before Dewey established the first library school, it was up to librarians to be apprenticed. Not only did apprenticeship not turn out the number of librarians needed to staff the growing number of public libraries being established in the United States, each apprenticeship was significantly different in length, training, skills taught, and procedures (Harris, 1995). Dewey felt that it would be of great benefit to hire librarians who had uniform training in the field of library work. The final result would be librarians who had the same training and could better fulfill the goals of the public library.

Dewey felt that each librarian should be trained to efficiently and accurately aid the library user in getting whatever material was needed. There are many skills that a librarian had to be able to demonstrate in their jobs in libraries. Dewey felt that skills in purchasing, organizing, managing, and locating materials in the library were imperative to serving library users (Dewey, 1884). Since Dewey saw the librarian acting on behalf of the common library user, librarians had to be able to select materials that were of the best quality.

Dewey also saw the role of the librarian as a selector of materials that library users wanted, needed, or requested the library to purchase, which meant that the librarian should also know how to find the information that was needed. This would require knowing where to look to keep up on the current trends, which is where publications like the American Library Journal, which is still being published under the name of Library Journal today.

Also included in the selector role of the librarian was the ability to judge whether materials were to be replaced or not, regardless of why the items were unavailable. The reasons for an item being unavailable have not changed since Dewey's tenure in the library. Materials could be deemed no longer useful due to loss, theft, or out of date material. The librarian was also expected, in Dewey's eyes, to be able to judge which of the most current materials would keep best and which ones were most useful to the patrons (Schuchat, 1985).

In addition to the ability to select or deselect materials, a librarian had many other skills that Dewey felt they must be able to demonstrate. A librarian had to be able to organize the library, which Dewey equated with cataloging. The ability to be familiar with and know which sources to use to provide the answers to patrons questions and needs brought about specific reference skills, including standard reference works such as encyclopedias, periodical indexes, and bibliographies (Williamson, 1923).

Librarians also had to know how to select and purchase the correct materials for the library users, as well as to be familiar enough with them to provide reader's advisory services to patrons. All of these skills were taught to librarians because Dewey felt that

they were necessary skills to develop to offer the library users whatever materials the patrons wanted or needed (Weigand, 1998).

As mentioned earlier, Dewey felt that it was important for librarians to stay current on library trends and that Library Journal provided a forum for just that purpose. Another way Dewey felt that librarians would be able to stay current on new trends and other library issues and problems included having the librarians be involved in a professional organization (Dewey, 1876).

Before Melvil Dewey became influential in the library world, there was very little communication among librarians in different libraries in the same regions, let alone between different states or parts of the country. Dewey helped establish the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876. This organization was created to foster communication among librarians, allowing librarians to share ideas, troubleshoot issues and problems, and to discuss issues pertinent to the library world. This fostering of communication was done by professional journals like Library Journal and annual conferences (Dewey, 1876). This would in turn allow librarians to better serve their library users (Stevenson and Kramer-Greene, 1983).

As mentioned several times before, Dewey was adamant that public libraries provide efficient, accurate service to its users. This study has discussed many aspects of user services from Dewey's perspective, but little has been mentioned of current practices that may or may not fit into what Dewey worked to achieve. Dewey felt that a librarian should provide not only what was quality material, and in doing so the librarian had to consider what the library user also wanted. In keeping with this theme, the public library

of today has managed to add many different formats of quality and popular information to its shelves.

Living in a society of rapidly changing technology was not new to Dewey, but today's technological changes outpace the technology of Dewey's day. Many public libraries feel that they must continue to provide the new technology to keep library users coming in order to survive. The addition of audiovisual materials, like videos and audiobooks, have brought in many users and still offer popular and quality materials to all library users (Fialkoff, 1996). Books are still popular, but dial-in access and web-based access have threatened to take over the use of books for providing information. The basic goal of the public library, providing whatever information is needed or wanted by the library user, is still the primary consideration in selection and acquisition of the materials purchased by the library today.

A very interesting development in recent history is the addition of the previously mentioned technological changes. While Dewey was responsible for adding new, efficient, well organized methods and equipment to the library, some of the innovations that Dewey was responsible for (like the paper card catalog) have gone by the wayside in favor of more modern equipment (like an online public access catalog, which is just a fancy term for the electronic card catalog). The public library today is moving to create a more familiar atmosphere for the users. Libraries have begun to include popular movies for borrowing, gift shops, borrowing of equipment like video cameras, and even areas to relax with a coffee and surf the web (Tisdale, 1997).

## CHAPTER V.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has been concerned with Melvil Dewey's impact on the public library during his career in the library field. It was easy to say that Dewey was a man of action rather than one who was content to sit and watch the library evolve without him. Dewey's obsessions with saving time and money, as well as an ingrained need for organization certainly fueled the work that earned him the reputation of being a "man of both ideas and indefatigable industry" as was pointed out earlier.

We saw that Dewey was not content to work in a library where there was no real organization of the materials that library users could find of significant value for a specific purpose. He just had to find a better way to make sure that the information contained in those poorly organized books could be better utilized, which resulted in the creation of an organizational system that still is used in most public libraries around the world today. Dewey's need to organize the library was just the stepping stone that was needed to bring the library into a modern institution that has been able to grow and adapt with the changing times since 1876.

The Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC) was created for librarians and users alike. The DDC was set up to be an organization system first, but ended up being the best way for librarians and library users alike to find the materials that they needed quickly and efficiently. The system was set up in Arabic numbers because Dewey felt that it would be more easily accepting of new subject classifications as the world changed. Dewey did recognize the limitations of his system, though he felt that the usefulness of the DDC outweighed the limitations.



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The Dewey Decimal system placed all of the materials that had similar characteristics (intellectual content) in the same place, known today as collocation. The result was a library that had all the books of similar content in the same place, which allowed a patron or librarian to search for the materials that were needed without knowing titles or authors. The system also proved useful for patrons and librarians to look for a book by title, author, or subject because each book had three specific cards in the card catalog to guide the user to the book with one piece of information. While there were three cards to represent the same book, the cards were shelved separately by the author, title, and subject to facilitate locating the book.

The use of a uniform organizing (cataloging) system fulfilled one of Dewey's specific goals in organizing the library: to have all of the libraries uniform in organization, so that a patron could walk into any library anywhere and be able to find whatever material was needed. Another goal of Dewey's was fulfilled at the same time as the uniform organization of the library. That was the ability of librarians to share the information from cataloging a book, thus saving the library money and staff time. Known as cooperative cataloging, this concept is still practiced today with the creation of MARC records from the Library of Congress and available on OCLC.

Once the library was operating efficiently and was beginning to really become organized, the library user became Dewey's focus. Since Dewey believed that the public library was a companion in educating the common man with the public schools, it was his belief that the primary responsibility of the librarians was to provide not only popular materials but also high quality materials. Fiction was fine for entertainment value, but

there was a need to provide materials that really could be used to help any neighborhood man, woman, or child learn something useful.

Essentially, any library user should have been able to have whatever material they wanted. This is still true today. Access to the material is the most important objective to the public library, and in the time since Dewey left the library field there have been many great improvements to protecting that right. Libraries have become accessible to anyone who wants to use them, and if the user cannot get to the library, the library now goes to them. This may be via web-based access, dial-in access, outreach services, interlibrary loans, branch libraries, or better access for people with physical disabilities.

Libraries have continued to grow as social centers as well. There are meeting rooms for community organizations to hold meetings, reading rooms, places to post information for local groups, and library sponsored programs for all ages. There has been a focus on keeping pace with the newest technologies available for library users, adding materials like CD-ROMs, video cassettes, books on tape, DVDs, and other popular items. Subject departments have been maintained since Dewey's time, becoming the norm instead of the exception. This not only keeps all of the similar materials together, it allows librarians to specialize in the particular subject, which is a tremendous boost for good user service.

Dewey's goal of creating uniform libraries had been reached long after his tenure in the library field was over. Libraries are not only uniform in devices but also methods. This developed as libraries began cooperating by sharing not only cataloging but also ideas, trends, and troubles. There is still room for individuality in the modern public

library, as the needs of the library users differ from library to library, but there is a common thread in the fact that a great labor saving concept has become a necessity.

The public library still maintains three objectives that Dewey maintained were necessary for the public library to observe while serving the users. The public libraries still intervene for the communities that they serve in selecting, recommending, and preserving the best and popular materials, both adult and juvenile, with children's programming and service being a major focus in the library field in recent years. Librarians still attempt to efficiently use the quality collections that they have built over the years, and the libraries still attempt to retain a proactive attitude toward promoting good reading for the local library users.

The librarians are still held to high standards as they continue to guide the library into the future. They are still expected to select books and materials that will be used by the patrons and to furnish whatever information is needed and/or requested by the library patrons. That includes knowing where to find the material, which gets more and more easy and complicated with the continual growth and invention of new technologies. Librarians still have to determine which missing and/or stolen materials need to be replaced and what format would be best to replace the material that is no longer available. The same dilemma applies with material that is out of date, especially in attempting to find material that may not be available because up to date information is not available.

Public libraries have to continue to provide services that are convenient to the library users. That may include longer hours of operation than Dewey may have ever thought necessary. Establishing and maintaining a wide variety of services is not an easy task for libraries. Dewey would probably be in awe of the amount of technology

available now for serving patrons. The internet is a very popular reference tool, but self service for patrons using the library is not only expensive, it requires the librarians to spend time teaching the patrons how to use the technology. This is not always an efficient use of staff time and library money, but it is what the library users want. So, one of Dewey's theories of library service is being fulfilled while there is another that is being shattered at the same time.

Libraries have continued to charge fines on overdue materials over the years, although there is a wide chasm between different libraries and what they charge in fines. The primary purpose to fines remains the same, to prevent theft of materials, but not every library agrees on how much is acceptable for a per diem fine. Most circulation times remain at a two week loan, and there are varying policies from library to library on how many times an item can (if at all) be renewed.

Librarians are still expected to keep on top of current trends, especially in what patrons are looking for in materials and programming. Library Journal, which was started by Melvil Dewey, is still used for that specific purpose although it is now an independent commentator, as opposed to being the primary publication of the American Library Association. Librarians are also still encouraged to be involved in the annual regional and national conventions offered by the American Library Association, continuing the tradition and purpose that Dewey had originally intended for the ALA.

When all is said and done, there has been a significant amount of change in the modern public library over the last one hundred twenty four years since Melvil Dewey became involved in the field of library work. Dewey's theories of organization in the library have been maintained rather faithfully since he began to implement them in the

late 1800s. The Dewey Decimal Classification System has changed over the years, but the integrity of the structure has been untouched since Dewey developed it. The changes in shelving and location of the materials were critical to the growth of the public library throughout the late nineteenth century and all of the twentieth century, and the integrity of the location of the materials has been maintained as well, since it relies on the Dewey Decimal Classification.

User services in Dewey's day were very significant to the public library. The evolution of the library has been successful for over one hundred years because one man cared enough about the public library to give it a solid foundation for serving its users, which is the whole idea behind the library in the first place. The theories behind library service to users are essentially unchanged in today's public library, although the actual methods are significantly different than what Melvil Dewey instituted.

## Suggestions for Future Study

Conducting another study like this would be a task that could prove to be very interesting another century from now. It would be quite revealing to see how Dewey's theories of public library service to users have stood the test of time. The changes in technology will undoubtedly affect the way library services have been implemented in the public library a century from now, as well as whether or not the public library has become virtual or will still be residing in cyberspace and brick and mortar buildings.

In a more reasonable time frame, studying the impact of just the American Library Association's impact on the public library would be revealing in itself. It would

provide an idea of what trends have lasted throughout the last one hundred years and what current trends are or are not in keeping with the theories that drove Melvil Dewey to implement in the library field during his career.

The same type of study could be done to determine what impact the evolution of the library school has had. This would be especially significant to determine what Dewey established as standards for earning a Library Science degree in 1876 and how similar or different library school curricula are today.

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